

The INQUIRER

70p

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The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7731 3 October 2009

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Reflecting on Auschwitz

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest

Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

*From the Object passed at the
General Assembly of the Unitarian and
Free Christian Churches 2001*

The Inquirer is published fortnightly by The Inquirer Publishing Company (2004), Registered Charity 1101039.

Articles express the views of their authors. Submissions are welcome and may be edited for content and length. They should be emailed or typed and should be the author's original work or be attributed appropriately.

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1-6 Essex Street
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Annual subscriptions are £25.

Cheques payable to The Inquirer.

Advertise for £6 per column cm, on 3-col page, plus VAT or £7.50 per col cm, on a 2-col page. A one-page supplement is £200. One column on a 2-col page is £100, on a 3-col page, £75. A5 fliers may be inserted for £70 plus VAT. Deadlines are available from the editor.

Births, marriages and deaths are 50p a word plus VAT.

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Inquiring Words

Holy One, we bring to this moment our memories of past evils, those done to us, and those in which we are implicated. We bring the joys and sorrows of our hearts, and the milestones and celebrations of our lives. We bring our fears about the future and the connections we feel to this community, this city, this landscape, this world. Help us to hold all these things and yet to go forward into the week and into our lives in peace and in determination. Amen.

— Christine C Robinson

A profound faith shared

In 1980, I visited Breendonk, a Nazi concentration camp in Belgium. An older man was our guide and in the course of our visit he revealed that he had been a prisoner there during the war. He spoke to its inhumanity. He showed us cutlery fashioned from prisoners' bones and lampshades made from their skin. We ran our fingers along the initials that victims carved in their bunks. He took us in a torture room that had hooks in the ceiling and blood stains on the floor. The guide had spent hours suspended from chains in that very room.

He believed it was a miracle that he survived the abuse, that he had been one of the lucky ones, that he was not lined up against a wall and shot. He was grateful too that he was able to track down his wife after the war. She had been held elsewhere. She, too, had been tortured.

A few days later, we met the man again. He introduced us to his daughter, a pretty young woman with blonde hair. He explained that she would never walk, and said her struggles were attributable to the terrible treatment he and his wife had received at the hands of the Nazis.

I will always remember what he told us.

He said he was not angry with his oppressors. He could not hate the men who gave the orders or the ones who carried them out. He could not bring himself to hate Hitler. He had forgiven them all, 'because if I continued to hate, that would make me just like them.'

That must be what allowed him to return to the camp, to the place of his deepest sorrow over and over again, to be in the presence of trinkets made from the bodies of his friends. That must be what allowed him to continue to teach this most important lesson.

Every year at this time, I think of that guide and his simple, yet profound, statement of faith. Earlier this week, Jewish people marked Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the last of the High Holy days, which begin with Rosh Hashanah – the new year. During this time Jews seek and offer forgiveness in order that they may be closer to God. Martyrology services are held at many synagogues to remember those who perished and to assert, 'Never Again'. That's why I am pleased we have Vernon Marshall's story about his recent visit to Auschwitz. We must all be willing to say, 'Never Again'.

— MC Burns

Correction

Myrna Mitchell, lay pastor at St Saviourgate Church, York, was mistakenly identified as a minister in the 19 September issue of The Inquirer. It was an editing mistake, as the materials submitted by York Unitarians did use her proper title – Lay Pastor on the roll of the General Assembly.

Never again

Auschwitz stands as witness to evil

Vernon Marshall is glad he spent part of his holiday at Auschwitz. Here he tells us why.

It may have seemed like an odd request, but, when my family and I went on holiday recently to the Tatra Mountains in Poland, I said that I wanted to visit Auschwitz. Poland encourages anyone visiting the region to go to Auschwitz and I am so glad I went.

With the sight of the brick barracks in the distance, I admit to having a sinking feeling in my stomach. My father fought against the Nazis in the Second World War and my childhood was unusual in that my older brothers and I were shown horrific pictures of concentration camp survivors. My father felt that nobody was too young to learn of the horrors of Nazism. I was, thus, under no illusions about the place.

What first struck me about Auschwitz was just how well

preserved everything was. The original camp, Auschwitz I, is almost exactly as it was during the war. The only difference is in the use of some of the buildings. Some of the barracks, all of them brick and with two storeys, hold displays inside – horrendous and shocking displays.

The point at which I nearly fell apart was entering a huge building filled with nothing but human hair. In one corner of the pile was the perfect blond hair of a little girl, complete with pigtails. Children at Auschwitz were usually killed immediately, unless they were twins, in which case they were kept for awful experiments conducted by Dr Mengele. I leaned against a brick wall, against which many prisoners were shot – following a brief kangaroo court trial. I stood in the Roll Call Square where prisoners often had to stand for 20 hours if the prisoner statistics could not be reconciled. Any prisoner who stumbled during that time was summarily shot. I walked into the gas chamber, with its very low ceiling, where prisoners had been given a flannel and small piece of soap and a number so they could ‘claim their belongings after their shower.’ I stood by the crematorium where hundreds of thousands were burned and I silently wept. I must confess feeling satisfaction at the

sight of the well-preserved gallows. Camp Commandant, Rudolf Hoess was captured, tried for mass murder, and brought right back to Auschwitz for hanging. The Commandant had a pleasantly large house and garden for himself and his family, almost next-door to the gas chamber.

Auschwitz II, just down the road, otherwise known as Auschwitz-Birkenau, brought even more horrors. Almost all of the 100 wooden barracks are still intact. Each of them held 1000 prisoners, with no sanitation included. About 100,000

prisoners had to make use of one small toilet, to be used for only a few seconds each day. Alas, most of them could never make use of such basic facilities. One can only imagine the stench, the filth, the disease. The Germans tried to destroy the gas chambers of Birkenau before they quickly left but they are still there. They are broken down and are just a heap of bricks, but they stand as a reminder of the inhumanity of the place. My daughter and I walked down the railway track that



Even with evidence such as Auschwitz's crematoria, some still deny the Holocaust, which is why we must remember the millions who were murdered. Photo by Pimke

brought a vast number of Jews, as well as some Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals and political prisoners, immediately to the gas chambers, without their even spending time in the barracks. About 1.5 million people, predominantly Jews, men and women, old people, children, and even little babies, were all butchered there.

The two sites at Auschwitz, the third camp having been destroyed many years ago, are very well managed. Each visitor is assigned a guide who is specially trained to treat the visit with respect. There are hundreds of visitors each day but somehow the calm and respect is intact. I hope the camp will be preserved for many years to come. I feel privileged to have paid my silent respects to those millions who were victims of ‘the banality of evil.’ With the increase in the influence of far-right politics, in the UK and in the rest of Europe, we need as many people as possible to witness the logical outcome of the politics of prejudice and hate and to say, with determination, ‘This must never happen again. Never Again!’

The Rev Dr Vernon Marshall is minister at Dean Row and Hale Barns.

Executive faces tough economic realities

Jim Corrigan reports on the September EC meeting

Probably the most significant decision made by the Executive Committee (EC) at its two-day meeting on 4th-5th September at Essex Hall in London, was to appoint Derek McAuley as the new Chief Officer for our General Assembly (GA).

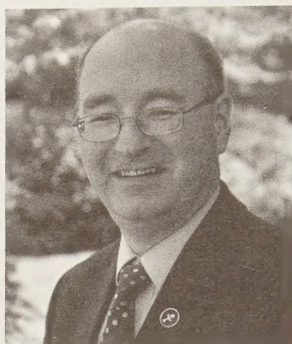
The mood was caught by the EC convenor, Sir Peter Soulsby, who expressed delight at the appointment. Derek McAuley – who is currently GA Hon Treasurer – has been a senior manager in the National Health Service in Merseyside and Manchester for 17 years, and has long experience as a voluntary sector trustee and chair. He expects to take up the new post in December.

The EC interview panel reported there had been a 'strong field', with eight applicants, five of whom had been interviewed. The former GA president Alan Ruston had been invited to attend the interviews as an observer, and he had declared the process 'very fair and thorough'. Of course, appointments often create problems – a vacancy now looms for a GA Hon Treasurer! The Executive began steps to fill this position (until the Annual Meetings next April).

Other important choices were made, following a sobering assessment of GA finances. The EC decided it could not at this stage approve national funds for two high-profile initiatives that had presented detailed plans and budgets. One was the pilot project for *future ministry*, where the EC had previously agreed the chosen cluster would be Scotland -- if the project was funded. For the present, it is hoped aspects of this project will go ahead without central funding.

The second detailed project, from the Education and Training Commission, known as REvolution, proposes developing Religious Education trainers within our denomination. Again we felt unable to make central funds available immediately. In discussing these two proposals, it would be fair to say that hard questions were asked about their viability and sustainability, but equally that both had their champions.

These were not the only projects that failed to win immediate funding. EC members had each agreed to bring along proposals based on the GA priorities agreed at our meeting in May. EC members lacked neither ambition nor imagination here! The proposals included: a part-time GA media consultant; part-time staff posts in information and social responsibility (urged at our last Annual Meetings); a full-time denominational Speaker (spiritual leader and spokesman); an officer for Ministry; and funding towards a Welsh Department secretary. The decision was the same: there is no GA money for these at present. (However, the question of staff positions will



Derek McAuley

be discussed with the new Chief Officer once he is in post.)

How were these funding decisions arrived at? We heard presentations on the GA finances from the interim Chief Officer, Karen Mallik, and from the GA Treasurer, Derek McAuley. The picture is stark: we are scheduled to end the financial year (30 September 2009) with a loss of up to £20,000; we have also drawn from some of our reserves; the GA Millennium Fund is near its end; and our investments have suffered in the downturn.

The Hon Treasurer highlighted his own priorities: maintaining effective financial management nationally, with a need for continuing accountancy support; supporting the Ministerial Students Fund through the fund-raising drive; maintaining the post of GA Youth Officer beyond the current two-year funding commitment from the Chalice Fund. But the Treasurer's main point was that 'live giving' must increase. The Bowland Trust has given a long-term commitment to match the funds we raise, to a total of £250,000 each year. Yet this year we are only expecting to raise about £150,000 through 'live giving' (which includes the membership quota paid by congregations). If we could raise another £100,000, we could expect it to be doubled (by Bowland), giving the GA £200,000 – enough for many new projects!

We decided to present the choices to the Annual Meetings in April: lots of exciting projects on offer, but, if we want them, how are we going to fund them?

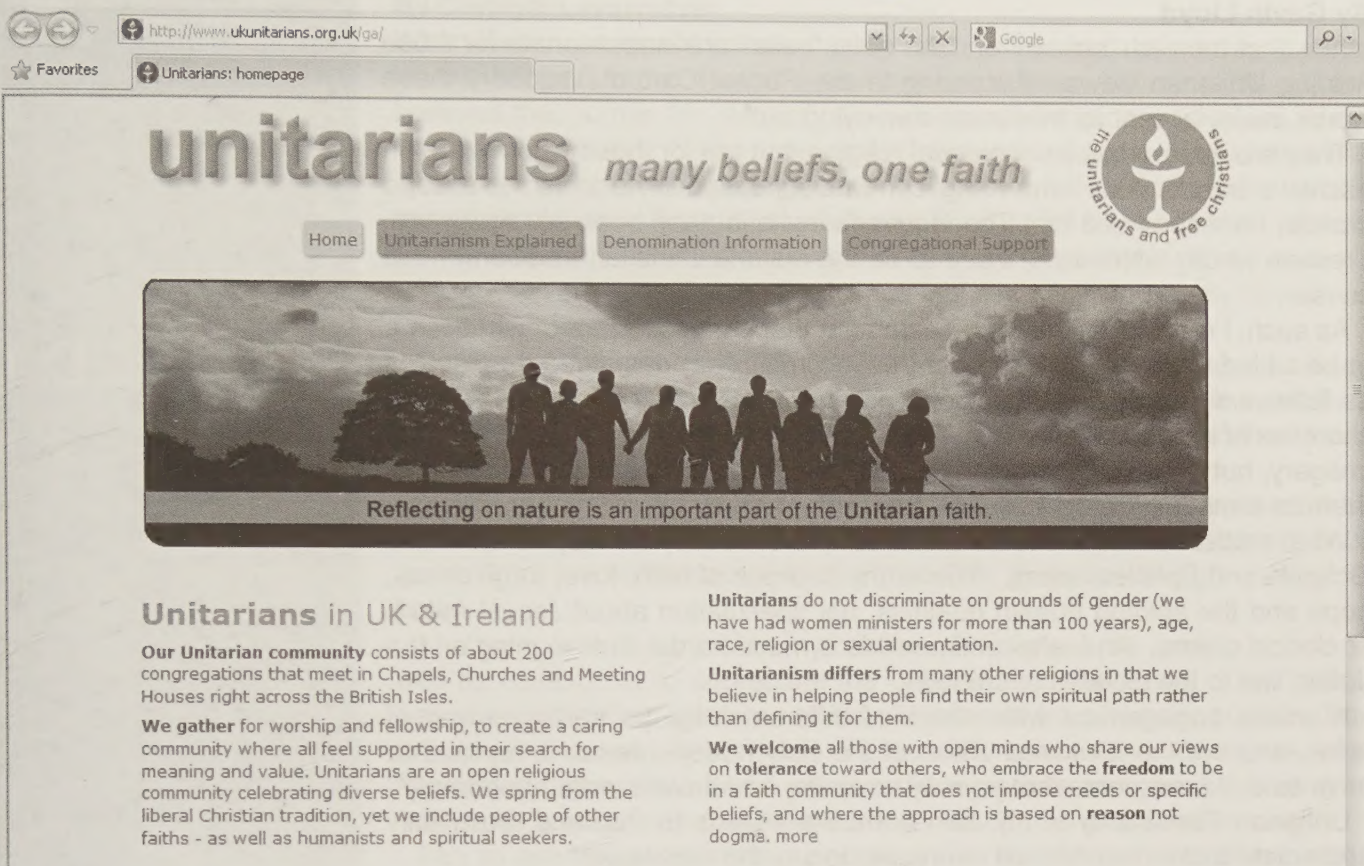
Other issues discussed included:

- The Rev Dr Ann Peart reported she was beginning to fulfill the role of interim secretary to the Ministry Commission, keeping the servicing of ministry 'ticking over'. She was willing to continue until the end of the year – she suggested a permanent appointment at senior level then be made (to give professional leadership the priority the EC had decided on). Agreed this will be looked at again in relation to staffing.
- It was decided that three London-based members of the EC help James Barry at Essex Hall and the Communications Commission in the final stages of the launch of a new GA website.
- We agreed that EC minutes would now be distributed on GA email only after approval at a full meeting of the EC.
- Nominations for Vice-President will be discussed at the next EC meeting (in November).
- Also to be discussed then: how to take forward recommendations from the report of the 'Hibbert Trust Collaborative Inquiry into the future of Unitarianism and Liberal Religion'.

The next EC meeting will be in Manchester on 6th-7th November -- Commission chairs are being invited there for discussions -- on GA finances and the recruitment of volunteers for the new triennium.

Jim Corrigan is a member of the GA Executive Committee.

New GA website goes live



Unitarians in UK & Ireland

Our Unitarian community consists of about 200 congregations that meet in Chapels, Churches and Meeting Houses right across the British Isles.

We gather for worship and fellowship, to create a caring community where all feel supported in their search for meaning and value. Unitarians are an open religious community celebrating diverse beliefs. We spring from the liberal Christian tradition, yet we include people of other faiths - as well as humanists and spiritual seekers.

Unitarians do not discriminate on grounds of gender (we have had women ministers for more than 100 years), age, race, religion or sexual orientation.

Unitarianism differs from many other religions in that we believe in helping people find their own spiritual path rather than defining it for them.

We welcome all those with open minds who share our views on **tolerance** toward others, who embrace the **freedom** to be in a faith community that does not impose creeds or specific beliefs, and where the approach is based on **reason** not dogma. more

By James Barry

During the summer, I realised that the development of the 'free websites for all congregations' facility was just about complete and the DUWIT (Development of Unitarian Website and IT) team really needed a new challenge. There was only one candidate - our national website. As a Unitarian, I have been embarrassed about it for a number of years for many reasons. It didn't answer some basic questions; it was confusing and out-of-date. When I looked under the bonnet, I found that internally it was badly coded, making it very time-consuming to maintain or expand.

I felt a new site needed a new overall structure and ended up dividing it into the three, reflecting the types of site visitors. I nick-named them 'punters', 'pewers' and 'preachers'. The first group just needed simple answers to what we are all about. In the world of the web, if fundamental questions are not answered very quickly, the surfer just moves on. So as well as Cliff Reed's brilliant *Unitarian! What's That?* as a perfect FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page, I also included some video clips we have collected and some well-written text pages. The second section of the site provides denomination informa-

tion. The big feature missing on the old web site was an easy way of finding the nearest congregation. It took some doing, but we now have a postcode facility, so it's very easy to find a local church or chapel. I didn't want to fall into the same trap as the last site, so the contact details are taken from a report produced from our main HQ database. So when details are changed there, we run a new report and the website is kept up to date automatically. The third area of the site is a resource section for the more active members and leaders. It currently contains some downloads, worship material and details of the 'help' services offered by Essex Hall. I really hope to expand this area over the next few months.

Yvonne Abarrow was a great help selecting the design and over all look of the site. But because all the styling details are held in one file, it will be very easy to give the whole site a new look in a few months time if we feel its starting to look a bit tidied. Lorna Hill provided proofing skills - ones which I badly lack.

The whole site has been designed to be very easy to alter and expand, so please do send comments with ideas for new pages or how to improve existing ones. If you find information that you feel is not correct, do tell us - we want

it to be right! I would also urge you to ensure www.unitarian.org.uk is now mentioned in all your publications now. I hope we have produced a site that will engage possible new members and encourage them to find out more about our amazing community.

I must also thank the other DUWIT member John Wilkinson, I would hate to think the hours this guys spends at his PC on Unitarian projects, but I know Unitarian web presences are so much richer for all this work. I often hear of people visiting congregations after being impressed with a congregation's web site. As it happens, we had a couple last week at Ditchling Chapel who came for that very reason. They drove 40 miles (past several other chapels), because they liked our site. After a great service from Stuart Coupe, I gave the couple my *lift pitch*. 'Unitarians think all of us have the right not to be told what we should believe.' It hit a cord and I know we will see them again. It makes all the web work worth it and I hope the new national site has the same effect that we have had with local sites.

James Barry is a member at Ditchling currently consulting with Essex Hall on IT issues.

Don't let differences divide

By Gavin Lloyd

I think that the verb 'believe' and the noun 'belief' are inappropriate for those holding Unitarian views. According to the *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* these words mean 'accept as true or as conveying truth'.

They are appropriate for a creedal religion, but not for those whose religion eschews creeds. As a former Anglican who espoused Unitarianism to escape creeds, I am surprised that *The Inquirer's* invitation has been so expressed. I remain wholly within what I see to be the historic Christian tradition of this cause.

As such, I recall from the New Testament that early followers of what came to be called Christianity (long after Jesus' crucifixion) described themselves as followers of the 'way', not believers in creeds imposed by the feuding churches of later years. On the whole I remain content with biblical myths and imagery, but it would be misleading and disingenuous to say that I 'believed' them as a matter of strict historical fact.

What matters to me is the life and example of Jesus, the way of which the Gospels and Epistles speak. This is the bedrock of faith, love, forgiveness, hope and the abiding human qualities, not speculation about Jesus' nature or clerical claims. And, alas at times this is much harder than signing on the dotted line to the dictates of credulity.

It entails engagement with others of different religious traditions and of none, and not the blinkered vision of the holy huddle. Jesus is reputed to have said, 'I have come that ye may have life, and have it more abundantly'.

Unitarian Christianity is my own particular means to that end, but I fully appreciate that it may not suit everyone, to say the very least.

The pursuit or otherwise of a spiritual quest is a matter of taste, temperament, history and upbringing.

This must entail differences of view and outlook without which there is no human progress.

Unitarianism should respect those differences and diversities. Long live those differences; may they never divide humankind.

Gavin Lloyd is a member of the Manchester College Oxford Chapel Society.

This I Believe is
engaging people in writing,
and beliefs th

this

We are all

By Sara Wilcox

When I moved to London nine that was widely regarded as a increasingly convinced that th I had been searching for God been raised in a Christian fan format).

I felt quite crotchety about i care who is right – I don't care Muslims, but I need to have so what our purpose on this ea quirky line-manager at the ti spirituality, and his life experi began a year of stumbling acro 'Embraced by the Light: Wha Change' and finally 'Conversa line manager's beliefs. I there to learn, and to learn to love, believe that Christians are not

Sara Wilcox is a

Contribute to 'This I Believe'

Write and submit your own statement of personal belief.

Tell a story

Be specific

Be brief: 300-500 words

Name your belief

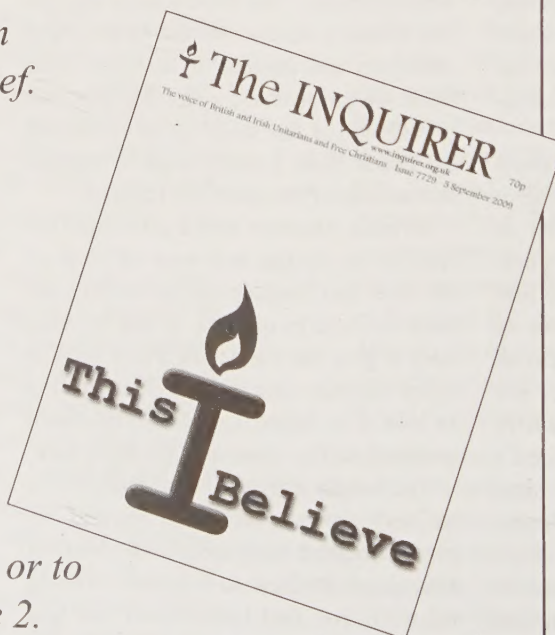
Be positive

Be personal

For more tips see: <http://thisibelieve.org/>

Send contributions to

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f the Richmond congregation.

Life is precious so give thanks

By Carolyn Levermore

When I was 8 years old I broke my leg, and I asked my mother why God had let this happen to me. I can't remember her answer, but since then I have believed that human life is full of ups and downs: happiness, joy, loss, disappointment, sadness. There is no great design or purpose to life, it is just life.

I believe in celebrating the good times. Nature can be wonderful: sunset, mountain streams, flowers, a new baby. Even small things like the morning dew or autumn leaves have a magic of their own if you look closely enough.

More than any material wealth, friends and especially my family have been, for me, a great blessing and reward.

But nature can be cruel too: floods, drought, ill health, old age. Relationships can falter; loss and loneliness have to be borne. My own life is relatively comfortable, compared with the deprivations of others. But we all, at times, have troubles.

Now – more than 50 years on from my bike accident and 2 years after being diagnosed with cancer – I believe even more strongly that life is precious, good times are to be savoured and that God gives us strength in troubled times.

My family and, in particular, my husband have given me great support – as well as helping me to appreciate the good times in the midst of the difficult periods. Comforting words and acts of kindness from friends, but also from unexpected sources have made a great difference to me. Strangers, often from other faiths, have found words to lift my spirits and give hope. And the "still small voice of calm" speaks to me in the depths of a sleepless night.

I try to see the good in other people and to be tolerant and patient and to understand that they may also be carrying troubles and anxieties in their life. But I hope also to have the courage to stand up and speak out when this is needed.

I believe the ups and downs of life are part of the human condition. Countless generations around the world have experienced birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, marriage, old age and death – each bringing reasons to be joyful or to grieve. For some, religion is a way of explaining what happens to us in life whether it be a reward or a punishment. For me it is unexplainable.

This I believe: Life is precious, give thanks for good times and for strength and hope found in "the still small voice of calm" and in the deeds and words of family, friends and strangers.

Carolyn Levermore is a member of Norcliffe Chapel Styal.

Everyone is a winner

By Gordon Jackson

Some days I find it difficult to meet the day. On those days my feelings and thoughts seek for purpose to rise and in so doing often miss the beauty of the day.

Then one day, I can't remember what prompted it, I had a thought, "Everyone who awakes is a winner."

In that moment it seemed irrelevant what circumstances we may be in whether homeless, rich or in between what mattered was we awoke and by awakening, we won.

This I believe.... Everyone who awakes is a winner.

Gordon Jackson lives in London Colney, Herts

Environment must take precedent

By Victor Anderson

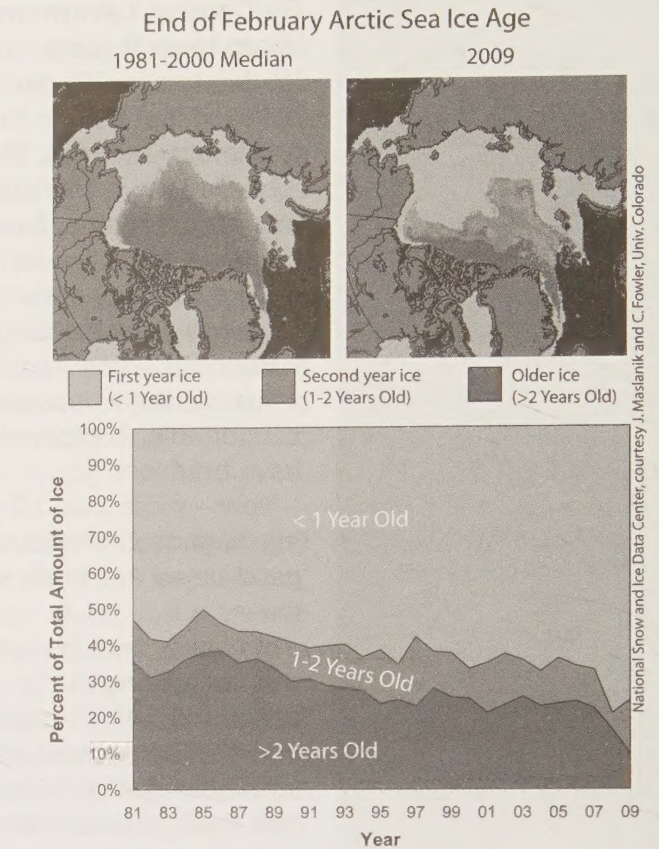
Activity is building up as the climate change negotiations in Copenhagen this December draw nearer. Copenhagen is intended to be the successor to Kyoto, which in turn followed Rio. In Rio de Janeiro in 1992, heads of government met at the Earth Summit, where they discussed and bargained on a whole range of environment and development issues, and came up with two treaties, one on saving biodiversity and the other on climate change. Leaders met again in Kyoto, Japan, in 1997, to add some specific numbers – ‘targets and timetables’ – to the agreement in principle on climate reached at Rio.

The Kyoto Protocol only really takes us up to 2010 – hence the need for a successor conference to agree a new protocol, adding a new set of targets and timetables, maybe taking us up to 2030. A great deal has changed since Kyoto – the scientific evidence now is that climate change is happening faster than was predicted, the end of George Bush’s presidency has made the US far more co-operative, the rise of the Chinese and Indian economies creates new problems and there have been shifts elsewhere – for example the recent general election in Japan bringing in a government more likely to take action.

In the UK, last year’s Climate Change Act setting legally binding targets has proved to be the start of serious action, followed up by the new policies on energy announced in the Government’s white paper this July. The picture is not consistent, with the plan to expand Heathrow Airport due to bring about a major increase in carbon emissions, and a long-standing failure to seriously improve the public transport system enough to attract people out of their cars. However, other parts of the Government’s policies are seriously cutting edge in relation to what is happening in other parts of the world, and the various mechanisms announced, such as ‘Carbon Budgets’ and the ‘Carbon Reduction Commitment’, will eventually bite in terms of changing the way governments, companies, and all of us behave.

Many issues are due to be debated in Copenhagen, and are already being discussed in the many preparatory, advisory, and drafting meetings taking place. These include, above all, two questions. One is: how ambitious are the new targets and timetables going to be, overall? The other is: what share of the burden of making adjustments is going to fall on ‘developing countries’, such as China and India, which have much lower carbon emissions per head than we do in the richer West? Are there the makings of a deal here, in which more technologically advanced economies offer some help in getting the developing countries to avoid the mistakes we’ve made in the West and head straight for a ‘clean-tech’ future? And what do we do about the political knock-on effects of such a deal, for example in relations between China and Japan?

The whole picture is fraught with difficulty because so many issues come into it, political, economic, technological, and scientific. Around the world, civil society and NGO (non-governmental organisation) activity is building up, pressing governments to face up to the various issues and sign up to some serious action. NGOs, scientists, and some religious leaders, have proposed various targets and timetables of their own, for example in terms of the maximum acceptable rise in average global temperature or the maximum acceptable proportion of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. All of which, in turn, affects



The latest Arctic sea ice data from NASA and the National Snow and Ice Data Center show that the decade-long trend of shrinking sea ice cover is continuing. New evidence from satellite observations also shows that the ice cap is thinning as well. Scientists who track Arctic sea ice cover from space announced that this winter had the fifth-lowest maximum ice extent on record. NASA graphic

the amount of flooding, hurricanes, spread of tropical diseases, extinctions of species, and so on, which are taking place as the climate shifts.

There are many campaigns and actions being organised. Here are just a few of them. An American-based organisation, Avaaz, is campaigning through the internet, sending out emails to its supporters, asking them to email politicians, take part in publicity stunts, and generally keep the pressure up (www.avaaz.org/en/). 350.org (www.350.org) is co-ordinating a worldwide set of events on 24 October. In London, a big Stop Climate Chaos demonstration is taking place on 5 December, two days before the talks start in Copenhagen.

350.org has an ‘interfaith wing’ you can read about at www.350.org/people/faith. Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, will be speaking on climate change in Southwark Cathedral on 13 October, in an event organised by Operation Noah, an interdenominational Christian grouping.

Probably the best way to keep up with the range of activity in Britain is through a new campaigning/networking organisation, Brighter Future, which has been set up to bring people together to support the various campaigns, so that people can support each others’ actions and cross-fertilise ideas. You can contact them at mail@brighterfutureuk.net. And, to see the latest science, the Scientific American website is very good: www.scientificamerican.com/earth-and-environment.

Victor Anderson is a member of Essex Church, Kensington.

Park Lane honours young member

By Lynne Readett

When our long-serving organist at Park Lane Chapel in Ashton-in-Makerfield died in 2007, money was allocated for a memorial in his name.

Harry Latham had been organist for more than 50 years and his good friend Nellie Newall thought long and hard about the way in which Harry's contribution to chapel life would be commemorated.

Harry always encouraged the children who came to Park Lane. He believed they made an invaluable contribution to chapel life; it was his pleasure to play music at the special services which the children have always led. So it was a fitting tribute to present a cup at the 196th annual children's anniversary service – but who would receive the award? There was a good deal of speculation but lips were sealed.

We all wore a sun symbol on the day and thought of things that brightened our days. We must all be on a similar wavelength, as there were three themes running throughout: Love of sunshine and the children's smiling faces; Being outdoors



A surprised but proud Ronan Chisnall was awarded the Harry Latham Memorial Trophy by the Rev Lynne Readett. Ronan's name is etched on the cup – the first of a hoped-for list of names.

and enjoying the sights and sounds of the garden or countryside; Getting up and looking forward to another day full of the unknown, a sure sign of the realisation that we are all part of a never-ending cycle of life.

The service was a huge success and the children enjoyed their time in chapel, one of three times annually when they stay with the congregation. The services are a pleasure. They are noisy and fast-paced, and children all-too-soon lose their concentration unless there is plenty of variety. The services are a delight, but I know all-too-well that this one hour of worship

has taken many hours of hard work. Thanks go to the children's leaders, Pat Halsall and Katrina Cunliffe. Without dedicated people on board it would be impossible to organise such events and we are most grateful.

One sad note in this happy story is that Nellie Newall, whose idea this all was, did not live to see the cup awarded. Sadly, Nellie died in 2008.

The Rev Lynne Readett is minister at Park Lane Chapel.

Up a ladder, in the kitchen, Bob always serves

By Ant Howe

Kingswood Meeting House gave thanks for one of its living heroes: Bob Edwards.

On 19 July, Bob relinquished his role as chairman of committee after 30 years of loyal service. Members of the congregation were determined to make it a special occasion.

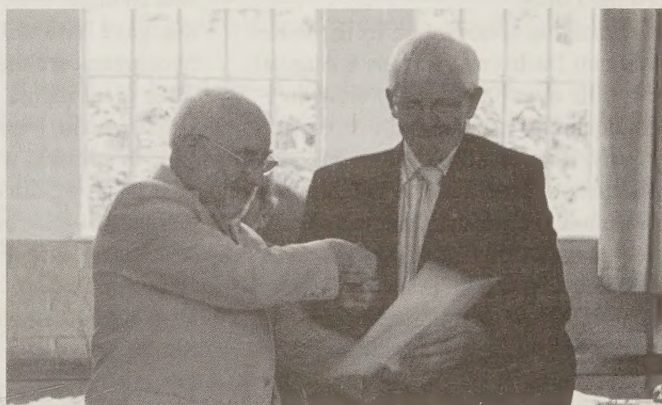
Since 1979, Bob has worked tirelessly for the chapel. Chairing meetings was just a tiny part of his work. Bob has always been on hand to climb a ladder, change a light bulb, put out the chairs, organise a work party, make the tea ... he has even been known to officiate at the occasional wedding!

When anything needed doing, Bob just got on with it – often the first to arrive and the last to leave. Whenever problems arose, Bob rushed to the rescue! In addition to this, Bob and his wife Barbara ran the Kingswood Boy's Brigade Company for many years.

Bob may have wanted to retire a few years back. But the then-minister announced his retirement and Bob stayed on to oversee recruitment of the new minister. He has been an invaluable support whilst the new minister 'found his feet'.

Three years ago Bob suffered a stroke but was determined to fight his way back to health again. In a matter of weeks, he was driving again and was back in the kitchen cooking up his famous (and delicious) food! In the last three years, the congregation has grown and changed considerably. Bob has taken it all in his stride and has embraced changes wholeheartedly.

The congregation couldn't let his retirement pass without marking it in style. After a quick AGM where Karen Burns was elected the new chair, there was a service in the chapel where we gave thanks for all who serve our congregation. At a



The Rev Peter Hewis, Midland Unitarian Association president, (left) thanks Bob Edwards for his 30 years of service to the Kingswood congregation.

buffet lunch following the service, Karen Burns thanked Bob on behalf of the congregation, committee and trustees. She presented Bob with a computer and a cheque (which Bob and Barbara intend to spend on a holiday to Canada). Barbara was presented with a bouquet to thank her for all her hard work and for her willingness to 'share' Bob with us for so many years. The Rev Peter Hewis, president of the MUA, thanked Bob on behalf of the District.

Bob is still a much-valued member of the congregation. He's even agreed to do one or two jobs, but he says he is looking forward to a rest! Sad as we are to lose such a wonderful chair, we can't blame him. He deserves it!

The Rev Ant Howe is minister at Kingswood and Warwick.

Letters to the Editor

A name that gives a sinking feeling

To the Editor:

Perhaps an appropriate new name for our denomination/community/movement/whatever would be the 'Titanicarians'.

Why? Because for so much of the time we behave as if we were re-arranging the deckchairs on that stricken ship (which was designed by a Unitarian, of course!). Over the last few years, we seem to have done little but tinker with our polity and terminology – to no discernible beneficial effect. And we are still at it! Perhaps, in considering our priorities, we should heed the words of our distinguished and neglected forbear, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, who lamented of our predecessors in the late 18th century:

"...the spirit of Devotion is certainly at a very low ebb amongst us, and what is surprising, it has fallen, I know not how, into a certain contempt, and is treated with great indifference..."

The Rev Cliff Reed

Ipswich Unitarian Meeting House

Don't dismiss materialism

To the Editor:

The exciting contribution from the Rev William Darlison (*Inquirer*, 8 August) is a little over-hasty, in my view, in condemning 'materialism'.

Firstly, if materialism can be proved to be true, one must believe in it, however profoundly and however understandably one may dislike it.

Secondly, and again in my own view, materialism has nothing to do with the psychopathic lust for money and other status symbols, which has deluded us humans since the dawn of history. Very little money is needed to ensure full material well-being. Ask any rough sleeper! Thirdly, I, myself, regard the matter as holy and divine. Like all holy things, it can be twisted into hideous forms. It is our task to untwist it.

Some philosophers, I believe, have identified matter with God. I would merely say that the ever-shifting matter in my body is my link with the divine.

Dr Michael Topham

Rochester

Unitarianism could offer a religious renaissance

To the Editor:

The Rev Bill Darlison is right to assert

in his recent and excellent article that our movement is 'afraid to challenge the dehumanising ideas of contemporary materialism'.

It is certainly high time that Unitarianism renounced allegiance to atheistic humanism with its despairing assumption that life is a meaningless pilgrimage from maternity ward to crematorium.

Instead we should surely champion the basic tenets of the world's major faiths: namely the existence of a benevolent God and personal immortality.

As a member of the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies, I know the amazing evidence for the existence of life after death, which has now accumulated for centuries. Our destiny is infinitely grander and nobler than shallow, contemporary science can envisage. It is well-portrayed by the great mystic Swedenborg and many eminent thinkers today who have painstakingly investigated the paranormal.

Without Christ's appearances to his disciples in his spiritual body after death and St Paul's psychic experience on the road to Damascus, Christianity would never have existed. Moreover, it was an angel's message to Muhammad that gave birth to Islam. Thus, psychic phenomena are the foundation of both these great faiths.

Unitarianism, by proclaiming the existence of spiritual worlds into which we pass when we die could lead to a renaissance of religion and eventually to a whole new era for mankind.

Graham Butler

Manchester College Oxford Chapel Society

Perceptions of Christianity make name-change essential

To the Editor:

In response to Alan Ruston's article in the 25 July edition of *The Inquirer* regarding the name of the General Assembly of Unitarians and Free Christian Churches (GA of U and FCC):

I was raised in a fairly liberal Church of England (C of E) Christian family. In the end, the homophobic angle which I felt I perceived in some of the sermons pushed me to seek out the Unitarians in Richmond where I am overwhelmingly happy and fulfilled – I wish I had found them a long time ago.

Additionally, I have worked for a lead-

ing charity for six years, and have seen its profile grow enormously in that time. When the marketing department expanded, I was cynical about its importance as compared with other areas such as help-lines, campaigns, fundraising, etc. But I have come to grudgingly realise that you need good marketing when competing for the public's attention. We Unitarians now find ourselves in this position.

I agreed entirely with Mr Ruston's view that things need to change. I doubt there is any likelihood that the name 'Unitarian' would change – although on one level I might argue for that. However, the next best thing I think would be to have, as Mr Ruston suggests, the word Unitarians/Unitarianism, and then a tag line. (I would go for 'Unitarians' over 'Unitarianism' personally just because an 'ism' reminds me of 'Puritanism' which is not helpful, but that may be just me)

I would advocate that the word 'Christian' is counted out, even in the context 'Free Christian'. Not only does this suggest that we think regular Christians are not free which is a description I am sure they would object to, my experience points to the likelihood that most people have mainly negative associations with Christianity. They think, for example, of abusive Catholic priests and generally old-fashioned attitudes towards women and gay people. I don't think an acronym would work. Again, judging by my experience, most people have not even heard of Unitarians so an acronym will completely confuse them. A snappy tag line underneath the word Unitarians would be my preferred choice, for example:

UNITARIANS, Peace, Love, Inclusion; or UNITARIANS, Peace, Love, Spiritual exploration. One of the greatest strengths of the Unitarian movement is its inclusive attitude (a church stand at a gay pride march?! Revolutionary and wonderful). People feel that religious people 'judge' them or want to 'convert' them (in fairness this is often based on direct experience) so we need to demonstrate our different stance, our possibly unique position as a church which welcomes everybody in a spirit of peace and love and spiritual exploration.

Sara Wilcox

Richmond

Ann Peart leaves one student behind

By Liz Shaw

On 17 July, some 70 friends, family and colleagues marked the retirement of the Rev Dr Ann Peart from her post as Principal of Unitarian College Manchester (UCM) and from full-time ministry.

The evening started with a service of thanksgiving for Ann's ministry led by Ann and the Revs Celia Midgley and Jan Berry, during which friends recollected Ann's time as a young Unitarian and May Queen, through her various ministries and finally her role as Principal of UCM which she held for seven years. Those gathered gave thanks and sang heartily to celebrate with Ann and her family. There were also numerous apologies from people who were unable to be with Ann to celebrate. A collage of photographs on the wall in the chapel reminded us all of her life and ministries.



The Rev Dr Ann Peart hands over custody of 'Theophilus' the bear to new UMC Principal, the Rev Alex Bradley. Photo by John Hewerdine

A buffet followed, complete with a chocolate fountain! And then all those who had gathered returned to the chapel where Jeff Teagle as Chair of Unitarian College Committee and Dawn Buckle as President of Unitarian College presented Ann with a number of gifts with a 'gardening' theme and a cheque for money raised for a testimonial from national Unitarians. Entertainment and fun then followed. College life will continue with the new Principal Rev Alex Bradley and to mark that Ann handed over 'Theophilus' the bear. He will continue to study at UCM, under

Alex.

A good evening was enjoyed by all (particularly Ann) and then it was back to work the following day as members of the GA Executive Committee were meeting at Luther King House!

Liz Shaw is an administrator at UCM.

Experience week struck gold

By Stephen Gutteridge

Unitarians from England, Scotland and Wales gathered at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow in Derbyshire in July. The purpose of this week-long gathering was to celebrate the 50th anniversary year of what used to be called the 'The Family Holiday Conference', which began in 1959 and which became the Unitarian Experience Week (UEW) in 1998.

The theme for this years 'Unitarian Experience Week' had the title of 'Searching For Gold – And Celebrating Golden Moments'. The word 'golden' relates to gold, a colour of richness, a period of creativity and prosperity, times when people are at their best, things that endure and are of value, the inherent worth and dignity of all people.

The days started with a morning meditation, followed by an act of worship and fellowship. Led by different individuals, they gave an opportunity to share Unitarian beliefs and ideals. Each day ended with an epilogue, also led by a different individual.

On Sunday morning, we attended the Unitarian chapel in the village. The local minister David Shaw warmly welcomed us to the service, and then gave his address based on the fable of King Midas. The gold of king Midas is in stark contrast to the gold of love, compassion and the fellowship of community which cannot be bought or sold.

During the day there were themed talks, workshops and discussion groups and more informal chats over meals. There were three speakers for the themed talks. Aled Jones spoke on 'Golden Moments in a Golden Era of Medicine 1959-2009'. Alan Ruston spoke of 'Golden Moments in Unitarianism and their Influence Today'. The Rev Dr Vernon Marshall delivered a talk on the theme of 'The Golden Essence in Religions'.

There were workshops and discussion groups which covered myriad topics. Jenni Taylor and a friend led a workshop on the theme of 'Young Darwin', Lesley Harris lead a workshop

on poetry and prose, in which people were invited to share their favourite pieces. David Talbot led a group in the study and practise of Tai Chi. There was also a workshop called the 'Golden Age?' in which Kath Riley led an exploration of the idea of a past or future golden age. Some of us braved the elements to do some walking, under the expert eye of David Copley.

One of the highlights of the celebrations was the 'Golden Moments Film Show' produced and hosted by David Milne.

The other workshops and discussion groups were led or facilitated by: David Allison, John Harley, David Dawson, Julie Dadson, Dawn Buckle, Derek McAuley, Gillian Peel, Kathy Beckett and Jill Allen.

At the AGM, Margaret McKay stepped down from the committee after many years of service. We would all like to thank her for her many years of hard work for the UEW. This is a good place to say thank you to the other committee members, for their dedication and hard work. And we should not forget to say thank you to the staff at the Nightingale Centre, who made our stay such a comfortable and enjoyable experience.

The social evenings provided the more informal side of the week's calendar. Music and singing were provided by the band who had been practising during the week. These musicians and singers were drawn from people taking part in UEW; others performed a party piece during the evening. Music for hymn and communal singing was played by Sheila Jones.

All too soon this week of loving fellowship and celebration came to an end. Then it was time to reflect on a week of fellowship and spiritual exploration; the opportunity to enjoy some of the natural beauty of the Peak District National Park. The socialising, friendships renewed or hopefully new ones started. Hopefully these celebrations will inspire Unitarians of whatever persuasion; to strive, to seek and find a truly golden future for Unitarians everywhere.

Stephen Gutteridge is a member of Bayshill Church.

News in brief

Hair eraser, fund raiser



Fun and games at Upper Chapel, Sheffield when John Norton volunteered to have his head shaved to raise funds for the 2009 Women's League Project, Meningitis UK. Chapel members applauded as John's son James first gave him a Mohican cut and then a full-head wet shave. John's sacrifice has so far raised a commendable £250.

Croydon ready to celebrate

Croydon Unitarians plan to celebrate 50 years in their present building on 1 November. An 11.30 service, featuring an address by the Rev Jane Barraclough (of Cross Street Chapel, Manchester), will be followed by a meal. An exhibition of photographs is planned and a time capsule will be sealed.

The upstairs meeting room will be dedicated to the Rev Robert Suffield, first minister to the congregation.

If you plan to attend, contact Congregation Secretary Pauline Peet on paulinepeet@hotmail.co.uk, or write to her at 5 Marten House, 1 Campden Road, Croydon, CR2 7EQ.

News from Lydgate Chapel

Our chapel took part in a local inter faith initiative 'Treasures Revealed in West Yorkshire' in which various religious buildings were open to the public for a week. Not only were we open, we lent our vestry to the Baha'is, who put a small exhibition in there. We got on well with the Baha'is. However, we had very few visitors.

In June we had surprise visit. Two young women were outside during a service. We invited them in. The girls settled down, but seemed a bit distant. We found out why – they did not speak much English. They were part of a Hungarian choir touring in England. They sang us a beautiful Hungarian hymn – a magic moment.

We were open for Heritage Weekend. Our schoolroom is now free on Saturdays, so we hope to show visitors around this Edgar Wood gem, one of the first flat-roofed buildings in England.

– Ray Vickers

Yoga Retreat planned for Southend

The London District is sponsoring a Yoga Retreat for the weekend of 5-7 February, to be held at Southend Unitarian Church. Gary Leggett, a member of the Southend congregation, is a highly qualified and experienced yoga teacher. He has generously offered to lead the Retreat for yoga practitioners of all levels.

Very favourable rates have been procured at a nearby Guest House, and in addition to yoga there will be opportunities for free time, worship, socialising, and exploring the town. Full details will be circulated in due course, but if you are interested, put the date in your diary now.

Get 'spooked' at Great Hucklow

Spend the mid-week of half term relaxing with your family at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre and let us have a Spooky time with your kids for Halloween!

Children's activities every day including a 'Fright Flight' through the Haunted Wood at Chatsworth Farm Park, lots of arts and crafts and even a trip down a dark cave! Lots of relaxing time for Adults. Prices from: £166 Adults: £126 12-16yrs: £111 5-11yrs : Under 5's are free!

Contact the Nightingale Centre to book: Tel: 01298 871218 or e-mail: info@thenightingalecentre.org.uk

For more information, see: www.thenightingalecentre.org.uk



This witty addition was made to the sign on the door of Stand Chapel in Whitefield. The members are doing their best to live up to it, according to their minister, the Rev. Beryl Allerton, who also took this photo.

SAVE THE ORGAN

Hammond electric organ, 2 manual, half pedal board in full working order. It's FREE. Carriage costs to be paid by new owner.

Contact Roy Buckle on behalf of Stockport Unitarian Church Trustees, telephone 01457 763 721 or email roy.buckle@btinternet.com